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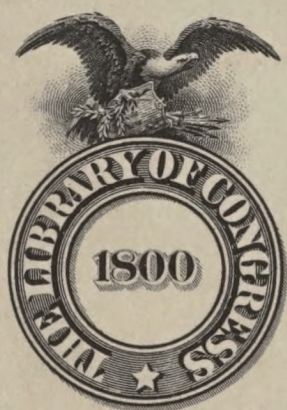
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CHRISTMAS IN FRANCE

Jean Noël





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"Jeanne thought she saw the face of the angel."

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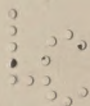
JEAN NOËL

Christmas
in France

By



Florence and Edith Scannell.



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CHRISTMAS IN FRANCE.

Jean Noël.



THE wind was blowing very fiercely and bringing with it heavy, copper-coloured clouds, evidently full of snow. The ground was already covered with a thick white carpet, which crackled under the wooden sabots of little Jeanne Briguez as she struggled up the steep path leading to the Château de Kerouailles. She carried a basket in one hand, while with the other she tried to hold the ends of a white woollen scarf round her. This was rather difficult, for the wind seemed inclined to play

pranks with the poor little maiden, and while he twisted one end of her scarf out of her hand and nearly pulled off her cloth cap, her apron flew up before her eyes, she stumbled against a projecting rock and dropped her basket! The contents rolled out on the ground, and alas! the twelve precious new-laid eggs were broken. When Jeanne saw this

disaster she covered her head with her apron and began to cry piteously.

"What has happened, *petite*? Ah, I see you have broken your eggs! Well, never mind; that is not a great misfortune," said a clear sweet voice that made Jeanne pull her apron down, and look up in astonishment.

A girl stood before her, a few years older than herself—about twelve years old; dressed, as Jeanne even in her trouble observed, all in blue and white, just as she herself was. But she was not a peasant; no, the dark blue hat shaded a delicately fair face that had evidently been protected from rough weather; long soft golden curls fell over her velvet coat, and her hands were tucked in a white fur muff.

Jeanne stood gazing at this vision, too bewildered to answer, until the sight of the broken eggs reminded her of her distress, and the tears began again to trickle down her rosy cheeks.

"*Allons!* don't cry. Where were you going with your basket?" asked the beautiful child.

Jeanne sobbed out that her mother was sending those eggs to the *Château*, where Tante Babette was cook, and she had promised her two francs, for eggs were very difficult to get, and mother was to get some meat for the *Four de Noël*. In fact, now they would have no dinner at all: for father had hurt his hand cutting wood, and had not earned any money for some time—oh, dear! oh, dear!—and the rent was owing, and now Tante Babette would be angry and would not buy any more eggs.

"But I can give you the two francs. I have a franc and Jean has another, I am sure," said the little lady,

turning to a tall, slim boy whom Jeanne had not before noticed.

He pulled out his purse and emptied it into his sister's hand.



"Only three half-francs, Yolande; that is all I have with me," he said, and Jeanne observed his voice had the same clear, musical sound as Yolande's.

"So now you will not have to go up to the Château, and that is lucky for you, little one, because the snow is beginning to fall, and you are not very well protected from it. Have you not a warm cloak like the peasants usually wear?"

"No, Mam'selle," said Jeanne, curtsying and blushing with pleasure as the coins were put into her hand. "Mother was saving up the money to buy me a blue one, for I am *vouée*—that is, to wear no colours but blue and white till I am seven years old; but she was obliged to spend it while father was ill—and now there is the rent. Thank you kindly, *Monsieur* and Mam'selle. May God reward you for your goodness!" she added, shyly.

"Oh, it is nothing! Goodbye little——what is your name?"

"Jeanne Briguez."

"And where do you live?"

"In that cottage on the side of the hill there."

"Quite up that steep path?"

"Yes, Mam'selle."

"Well, you must run home, before the snowstorm comes on, or you will be lost, little Jeanne; you have a good way to go—and don't cry any more," said Yolande, kindly.

"Think of Jean Noël: perhaps he may pay you a visit," added the boy, smiling at the little peasant's round eyes "I hear he is about this part of the country."

Jeanne opened her brown eyes wider than ever at this, and, dropping a curtsy, set off running in the direction of the lonely cottage where she lived with her parents.

Her mother was standing at the door, and was surprised and delighted to see her back so soon, for the snow was

beginning to fall quite fast by this time, and she was afraid Jeanne would have been caught in the storm.

"Oh, mother!" cried Jeanne, "I dropped the basket and broke all the eggs, so I did not go on. But stop, mother! don't be unhappy!" as the poor woman threw up her hands



in despair; "look here!" and Jeanne turned out the money from her pocket. "I met a lovely little lady, all in blue—just like me!"

"Like you! Is the child mad?" exclaimed the mother, bewildered.

"No, I mean dressed like me; no, not like me," hurried

on Jeanne, too excited to arrange her ideas, "but all in blue, only her coat was velvet—oh, so beautiful!—and she had the loveliest golden hair, and silk stockings, and blue eyes, and kid boots!"

Madame Brigneux could not help laughing at Jeanne's mixed-up description.

"And what happened? Did she speak to you? Did she give you the money?"

"Yes, mother," and Jeanne related the whole adventure; in fact, her mother heard of nothing else all the time she was preparing the supper.

"It must have been the little Countess Yolande and her brother. Babette said the children were to arrive before the rest of the family. That was why she was so anxious to have the eggs. What a pity they were broken! But don't trouble yourself, *ma fille*, I know you could not help that."

"Mother, who is Jean Noël?"

"Jean Noël! Oh, that is an old tale! I remember my grandmother used to tell me about him. It is a legend that he is heard singing in the mountains about Christmas time, and generally comes to some poor cottage—sometimes in the form of an old man, sometimes as a little child. If the people are kind and receive him well they do not regret it, for he brings happiness and love with him. But it is a tale, *mon enfant*, so don't be troubling your head about him. The little Count was joking, that was all."

"But is Jean Noël an angel, then, mother?" enquired little Jeanne in an awestruck tone, fixing her big, serious dark eyes on her mother's face.

"Yes, that's it," answered her mother; "and angels won't go where the people are bad, so it is only those

who try to do their duty that Jean Noël ever visits, my grandmother said."

Jeanne pondered deeply over this, until her father came in, looking like a snow man, so covered was he from head to foot.

"It is lucky it does not thaw yet, or I don't know how I should have got home," he said, shaking the snow from

his broad-brimmed hat and out of his long hair.

"Ah, soup, that is good!" as his wife placed a bowl before him, with a piece of black bread.

Jeanne was longing to tell him of her meeting, but he looked so wearied and sad that she did not like to begin till he had rested awhile.

"*Eh bien!* Pierre, did you see Maître Rigoux?" asked his wife.

"Yes; he says the money must be paid by the first of January or

we must turn out, as he has another tenant willing to pay more rent."

"Oh, Pierre! after your father and grandfather having always lived here! I am sure the Count would not turn us out. If we could only let him know!"

"Ay, that's just it—but we can't; and, what's more



there's no chance of our getting the money. I went round everywhere I could think of, to see if any wood was wanted, but only got an order from the Doctor for a few logs."

"If only Jean Noël could come!" thought little Jeanne. "What a pity those olden times were past when her great-grandmother was alive and such things happened!"

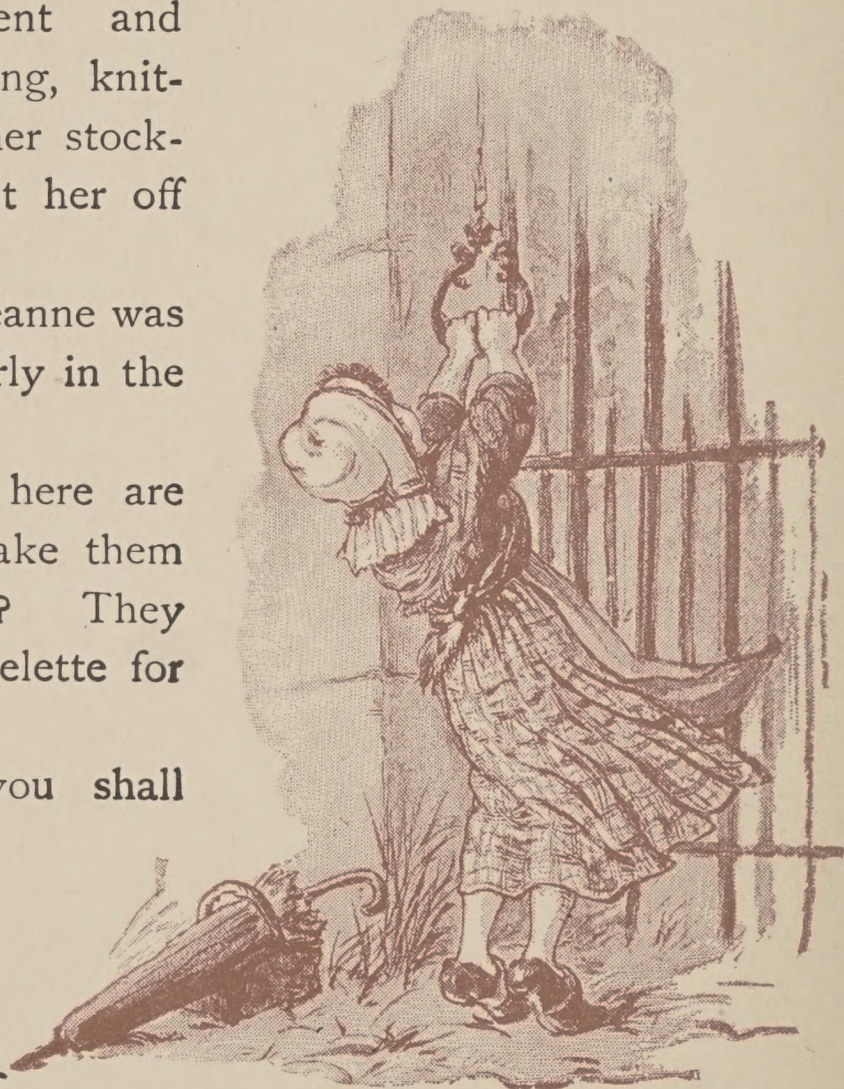
She was very silent and thoughtful all the evening, knitting diligently away at her stocking, till her mother sent her off to bed.

The next morning Jeanne was up early, searching eagerly in the hen-house for eggs.

"Mother! mother! here are three eggs? Shall I take them up to Tante Babette? They would make a little omelette for the young Countess."

"Yes, dear child, you shall go with them; it is a nice bright morning."

Jeanne was soon ready, and started on her way. She had a project in her little head, and was wondering how she could manage to carry it out. If she only had the courage! At last she reached the big iron gates of the old Château, and managed to pull the bell by standing on tip-toe and holding on to the chain with both hands. It nearly lifted her off her feet, but she heard the clanging in the distance and the



click of the bolt as it was drawn up a few minutes after, and, pushing open the heavy gate, she trotted round to the back entrance and entered the big kitchen.

“Well, you little Good-for-Nothing,” said Tante Babette, her broad face beaming at the sight of her niece. “Where are my eggs, I should like to know? A pretty person your mother is to promise me some. Let me see what you have



there. Three! Why, have you come up all this way to bring me those? Bah—and I wanted them last night! Get along with you!” and Babette pretended to walk off in great indignation.

“But, Tante Babette, listen to me,” pleaded Jeanne, holding on to her aunt’s thick woollen skirt. She then related her adventure of the day before.

"Oh, ho! that was it, eh? Well, I suppose I mustn't scold," said Babette. "Here, *petite*, I dare say you have not had much of a breakfast," and she pushed Jeanne into a chair and gave her a bowl of warm milk and a piece of white bread, which was a great treat to the child. Jeanne chattered away, asking no end of questions about the little Countess, and told her aunt the trouble her father was in about his rent.

"Dear Aunt Babette, can't you ask *M. le Comte* to let us stay in the cottage?" she begged.

"My dear, I never see the Count; and I don't suppose he knows anything about the cottage. Maître Rigoux arranges all that; the Count doesn't trouble himself about such things."

Jeanne sat silent and troubled.

"If the little Countess Yolande would speak about it," she said hesitatingly, at last. "Would she listen to me if I asked her?"

Babette looked grave. "Well, that is not a bad idea. I will go and ask Fanchette, the maid, if Mam'selle Yolande is willing to speak with you."

Jeanne felt very frightened while her aunt went to make the enquiry.

"It would make father and mother so happy," she said to herself, to keep up her courage. She had been longing for this opportunity all the time of her walk to the Château, and now it had, perhaps, come, she felt her heart sink.

Babette returned, smiling.

"The Mam'selle will see you, ma *petite*. Now, remember to curtsey prettily."

Jeanne got up and followed her aunt, holding a bit of her

gown as they went up the stone staircase, and stopped at the door of a room in one of the round towers. Babette tapped at the door.

"Come in," said the sweet voice Jeanne remembered. Babette opened the door and pushed in her trembling little niece.

"Good morning, little one!" said Yolande, smiling kindly at her.



Jeanne dropped a curtsy and stood twisting the corner of her apron, not knowing how to begin her story. She thought Yolande looked like an angel or a fairy as she stood there, her golden hair falling over her shoulders, and dressed in a white woollen frock and blue ribbons.

"Come and have some bon-bons, and would you like to see my doll?"

Jeanne gazed in awe and admiration at the wonderful doll, dressed all in satin, which held an eye-glass in her hand, and could walk and turn her head, and she felt she ought to curtsy to such a fine lady. Yolande's brother was in the room, but was apparently absorbed in studying some old books, and did not come forward. After a little while, encouraged by Yolande's gentle, gracious ways, Jeanne made



an effort to tell her trouble about the cottage. Yolande listened with great attention, and promised to speak to her father as soon as she could.

"He is not yet arrived; but I will not forget, little Jeanne."

"Thank you, thank you, Mam'selle!" said Jeanne, her brown eyes shining as she made her best curtsy.

What a delightful secret she had! It trembled on the

tip of her tongue a dozen times that day, as she followed her mother about the cottage, helping to clean all the pots and pans, and get all in order for the *Fête de Noël*. There was a small piece of salt pork in the larder and a new loaf of rye bread, which her mother had been to the market to buy. How hard they both worked, and how bright and clean everything looked! The logs crackled merrily on the hearth when her father came home that evening.

"It is just coming on to snow again, and it is very cold. We are fortunate to have a roof to shelter us this bitter weather. God help those who are not so well off!" he remarked, as he drew his chair to the table.

"If only we had the money for the rent, Pierre!" said his wife, anxiously. "Who knows, but soon we may be out in the cold, homeless!" and she wiped her eyes with her apron.

"Don't go to meet misfortune, *ma bonne!* It is bad enough when it comes," said Pierre, sadly.

"But, mother——" began Jeanne eagerly, when her father held up his hand and said, "Hark!"

A clear, sweet voice sounded through the night air, singing the well-known Christmas hymn:—

"Il est né, le divin Enfant,
Jouez, hautbois ; résonnez, musettes,
Il est né, le divin Enfant,
Chantons tous son avènement.

"Depuis plus de quatre mille ans,
Nous le promettaient les prophètes ;
Depuis plus de quatre mille ans,
Nous attendions cet heureux temps

"Ah ! qu'il est beau, qu'il est charmant,
 Ah ! que ses graces sont parfaites—
 Ah ! qu'il est beau, qu'il est charmant,
 Qu'il est doux, ce divin Enfant.

"Une étable est son logement,
 Un peu de paille est sa couchette,
 Une étable est son logement,
 Pour un Dieu, quel abaissement !

"Il veut nos cœurs, il les attend,
 Il vient en faire la conquête ;
 Il veut nos cœurs, il les attend,
 Qu'ils soient à lui dès ce moment !

"O Jésus, ô Roi tout-puissant,
 Tout petit enfant que vous êtes ;
 O Jésus, ô Roi tout-puissant,
 Regnez sur nous entièrement."

"Who can it be, out so late, on such a night !" exclaimed Madame Briguez.

Pierre put the light in the window, so that it could be seen. "That will guide whoever it is," he said. A few minutes later a tap was heard at the cottage-door. Pierre opened it at once, and there stood a slight, fair boy, dressed in the costume of the country. He held a horn, or *cornette*, in his hand, like the shepherds used to call in their flocks, and was sheltered from the cold by his warm, thick cloak. He asked if he could have hospitality for the night, in Breton dialect, but with a different accent to what Pierre was accustomed.

"Enter, enter ; you are just in time !" said Pierre, heartily.
 The boy came in, thanking gratefully. He took off his

hat, and as the wood fire blazed up, Jeanne thought she saw the face of the angel in the painted window of the old church. His large clear blue eyes had the same sweet pensive expression, and his fair hair waved back from his forehead like an auréole of pale gold. He stretched out his slender white hands to the fire and shivered slightly.

"You are not accustomed to be out in the cold, sir?" observed Jeanne's mother, feeling she was not speaking to a



common shepherd-boy. There was something mysterious about the stranger that impressed them all.

"No, I do not often visit the hills at this hour," he answered, smiling. "I am fortunate to have fallen in with kind folks."

"We are only too happy to be able to shelter you," said Madame Briguez; "you are just in time for supper, I am about to prepare it."

Pierre told his wife, privately, to cook the meat. "For we

don't often have a guest, and we must treat him to the best we have."

"Yes, yes, you are right, Pierre," and the good woman bustled about, and Jeanne helped to lay the cloth and peel the potatoes.

The guest, meanwhile, talked to Pierre, asking him how long he had lived in the cottage, and who was his landlord, not in an inquisitive or impertinent way, but with real interest. Pierre felt wonderfully confidential, and found himself, contrary to his usual habit with strangers, relating all his misfortunes to the youth.

"Will you not take off your heavy cloak?" enquired Madame Briguez, as she came to tell them the supper was ready.

"No, thank you," he answered.

It was a very small bit of meat, and Madame Briguez had only one mouthful, but she carefully concealed this fact from the rest, and helped the young stranger bountifully. He was evidently hungry, and enjoyed the simple fare, to the great delight of his entertainers. After supper he sang several more songs, most of them relating to the Christmas festival, bringing tears to the eyes of Jeanne and her mother as he sang of the weary journey to Bethlehem, and no room at the inn for the travellers.

Jeanne could have sat at his feet all night, gazing at that beautiful fair face, and listening to that sweet voice, but the boy himself began to look pale and tired, and Madame Briguez made him up a bed near the warm hearth. Jeanne clambered up into her little room in the loft to dream of the wondrous guest. All sorts of fancies crowded into her head. He was again sitting at the table, and his cloak slid from his shoulders,

and Jeanne was not the least surprised to see he was all in glittering white robes. Then two large wings opened out and bore him away, while the light from his golden hair shone



round him like a glorious halo. "Mother, mother, it is Jean Noël—he is going!" she tried to call out in her sleep, and

started up in bed, to find she was only dreaming after all. Still, was not that the door she heard softly closing? It was still dark, and Jeanne lay down again to dream once more of the visitor, till she heard her mother's voice calling to her to get up. Jeanne rubbed her eyes, and then tumbled out of bed and dressed herself as quickly as she could. Her father and mother were standing in the kitchen looking rather astonished to find their visitor of the evening before, gone!

"He might have waited to say goodbye and thank you, at least," said Madame Briguez, as she pulled the coverlet off the bed.

"Why, Pierre! Jeanne! what is this?" she exclaimed.

Under the coverlet lay a beautiful little blue cloak, just the size for Jeanne, with a paper pinned on it—"For Jeanne Briguez." But this was not all; a paper lay folded on the bed, addressed to Pierre Briguez. Pierre opened it, and what was his astonishment to find inside the packet several gold pieces (more than enough to pay the whole year's rent), and the words—"From Jean Noël."

"The good God has sent an angel to help us!" exclaimed Madame Briguez, as soon as she could speak.

"Yes, indeed, let us thank Him," cried Pierre, falling on his knees.

"Oh, mother, mother, it is what the little *Comte* said, it was really Jean Noël who came to visit us," said little Jeanne in a tone of awe. "He flew away to Heaven in the night; I saw him go with his beautiful white wings, and I thought it was a dream."

"It seems to me **as if** we must be dreaming now," said her mother, rubbing **her** eyes hard, and expecting to see the gold and the cloak **vanish** as quickly as they had appeared.

But no, they remained, and Jeanne nearly cried for joy to think she should have such a lovely cloak to wear in church on the next day, the *four de Noël*.

And yet more! In the afternoon, Babette's broad, good-tempered face and stout figure filled up the doorway, and from under the ample cloak produced a basket full of good things.

"*Madame la Comtesse* arrived yesterday with Monsieur, and this morning Mam'selle Yolande comes running to the kitchen. 'Dear Babette,' says she, in her pretty way that would make a stone do anything she wished, '*Maman* says you are to get a big basket, and I may put in whatever I like, to send to those good folks in the cottage there.' 'Very well, Mam'selle,' says I, 'only please leave something for the *déjeuner*.' She flitted here and there, and would have filled half-a-dozen baskets with croquettes and sweet dishes, and such like. At last I persuaded her to let me put in what I knew would be more useful, and here I am, and pretty heavy the basket is, I assure you. Ouf!" And Babette, who was not much accustomed to trot up and down the steep, rocky path, sat down and wiped her face, while Jeanne and her mother emptied the basket, exclaiming at the splendid feast.



A roast capon, a large piece of bacon, a huge galette that made Jeanne's eyes shine, a cream cheese, a big white loaf, and a bottle of wine! And now they had their joyful news to tell of the mysterious visitor of the evening before. Babette shut her mouth, looked very wise and nodded her head, but said nothing.

"Did you ever hear of such a thing happening before, Babette?" enquired Madame Briguez.

"*Heard* of it! ay, many a time, but it's the first time I ever came across the fact," replied Babette, looking deeply thoughtful.

She gazed at the gold pieces and the cloak with a puzzled expression. Madame Briguez made some coffee, and, after Babette had had a good rest and delighted them all with her stories of the doings at the Château, Pierre walked back with her, talking of the happy ending of his troubles.

But at the Château was this appearance of Jean Noël as great a mystery as at the cottage? We must go back a little in the story, and see what happened after Jeanne's visit to Yolande. The rosy, eager face of the child had only just disappeared from the doorway, when Yolande's brother jumped up and came forward from the back of the room, exclaiming:

"Yolande, how delightful! It is just what I was wishing for!"

"What is delightful, Jean? Come quickly, and tell me."

Jean came up to the big fireplace where Yolande was sitting. "I have an idea," continued Jean; "a secret."

"Oh, delicious!" cried Yolande. "Is it anything about

helping our dear little Jeanne? That is what I would most like to hear."

"Yes, that is just the very thing. You remember I told



her that Jean Noël was somewhere about. I thought of it then, but only to take some good things to eat, in a

basket, and leave it at the cottage-door. *Now*, I think we can do more. I have my Breton costume here, that I wore at the fancy dress ball in Paris. Wouldn't it be fun for me to dress up in it, and act the part of Jean Noël myself? I have just been reading up some of the old Christmas songs in that book, and while Jeanne was talking to you, I made up the whole plan."

Yolande listened with the deepest interest.

"If only papa will allow me," went on Jean. "I did not come forward, so that Jeanne should not recognize me. The other day her eyes were so full of tears she scarcely saw me, and then the dress will make a great difference. If papa would only let me take some money for their rent!"

"We must both beg him to let us help them, and I do so wish to give Jeanne a warm cloak. What a lovely plan! I wish I could go with you, but that would spoil all. How soon will papa and mamma be here, I wonder? Let us get out your costume and try it on, Jean."

"Better not, in case some of the servants see me in it, and they might talk. We must keep it *quite* secret. We can practice some of the songs, though. Come and play some of the tunes, Yolande, and let us arrange what we can say to papa. I am sure mamma will help us."

When the Count and Countess arrived, the children lost no time in relating their meeting with the little peasant girl, and her visit to the Château.

"Dear papa," said Yolande, "if you had only seen the good, little woman! She was so frightened at first, she could hardly speak; but, when she thought of her poor parents, she begged so earnestly for you to let them stay in the cottage; and she had such big brown eyes, I am sure you

would have promised her anything she wanted—and it will make me *so* happy!” added Yolande, as she laid her soft cheek against her father’s arm, caressingly.

“But, my dear child, I cannot afford to let all my peasants live rent free, and I must not favour one because his little daughter has big brown eyes. I should soon have no home for you, much less any Christmas or New Year gifts.”



“But I don’t want any New Year’s gift. I have so many things,” coaxed Yolande.

“Not the watch you wished for so much?” asked the Count.

Yolande hesitated one instant. She certainly did long very much for a watch of her own; but the temptation soon passed.

“I would rather have the money to give Jeanne, papa,” she said, gravely.

"And, father, you said I might choose my birthday present," put in Jean, eagerly; "and I want you to allow me two or three hours to do just what I like in."

"Poor boy! he is never allowed to do what he likes," smiled the Countess.

"Oh, mamma, I did not mean that! but I will explain," answered Jean; and proceeded to unfold his plan of visiting the cottage. It needed some persuasion before Jean's father and mother would consent to his going out in the cold and dark, but the united entreaties of Yolande and himself at last prevailed, and they both entered heartily into the plan. Yolande went with her mother to buy the little cloak for Jeanne, and they both helped to dress up Jean and arrange the packets.

"The price of Yolande's watch and of the pony you were to have had, Jean, will be quite enough for the year's rent, I should think. Old Babette says the Briguez are honest and industrious people, but the accident to Pierre's hand has been the cause of their poverty this year," said the Count, as he gave the money to Jean. "Baptiste is to go with you, but he will leave you near the cottage, and will be waiting outside with a lantern an hour or two after. He will keep the secret, I am sure."

Yolande carefully pinned the little blue cloak for Jeanne inside Jean's warm thick one.

"Don't forget, and take it off, Jean!" she entreated.

"No fear. I don't suppose they will have much of a fire; I shan't be too warm," said Jean, who was in high glee as he set off on his expedition, his mother's kiss on his brow, and her gentle, "God bless and protect you, my darling boy!" in his thoughts.

Yolande nestled close against her father's side, picturing to herself Jeanne's delight and bewilderment when they found the cloak and the mysterious packet of money, and the astonishment of Pierre and his wife, who would not understand it at all, for Jeanne was to say nothing of her request to Yolande



"Oh, I am so happy!" cried Yolande, her blue eyes shining as she embraced her father and mother, and then ran to the window to watch for Jean's return, longing to hear his account of the visit to the Briguez.

It was past nine o'clock before the sound of the *cornette* was heard announcing Jean's approach, and Yolande flew down the

broad stone staircase and stood waiting at the hall-door to welcome him. She seized his hand, and they both ran back to the warm sitting-room, where their parents were waiting, and they all sat round the blazing wood fire, and listened to Jean's description of his visit to the cottage.

What a rosy, happy little face it was, that appeared above the warm blue cloak as Jeanne trudged soberly along to church the next morning beside her father and mother, her own little prayer-book carefully wrapped up in a clean pocket-handkerchief. The old church was full, and Jeanne was too small to see much at first when they went in, but she looked up at the painted window, and her favourite angel seemed to smile down at her.

Presently her mother whispered, "Look, Jeanne, up there near the chancel, there is the family of the Comte."

Jeanne gazed eagerly, hoping to catch a glimpse of the little Countess Yolande. Yes, there she was; her large felt hat with its feathers, the thick soft coat and long fur boa, all pure white like the snow outside, setting off her fair face and golden hair, on which the sun was shining from the window behind.

Beside her sat her brother, and—was Jeanne dreaming again?—he had the same face and waving golden hair as their angel visitor. Jeanne pinched her fingers to make sure she was awake, and could hardly wait patiently till the service was over to ask her mother if she also saw the resemblance. The Briguez family waited outside the church to exchange greetings with their friends, and watch for the coming out of the Count's family. They were walking, and acknowledged the salutations of the peasant-folk by bows and smiles. The

two children were behind their parents, and Jeanne's heart beat fast when Yolande stopped in front of her, and after Madame Briguez had thanked her for the basket of good things, Yolande said:—

“Well, little Jeanne, did not my brother speak truth when he told you that Jean Noël was expected?”

“Ah, Mam'selle, did Tante Babette tell you?” asked Jeanne, eagerly.



Yolande laughed, and Madame Briguez, who had been looking earnestly at the brother, exclaimed—

“Ah, I see now, it was the little Count himself that came, and not Jean Noël at all! How can we thank you, Monsieur,” she continued, seizing his hand and kissing it. “You have indeed brought happiness to us all, and you too, Mam'selle.”

“But stay, ma bonne, it was really Jean Noël, that is my

name, to-day is my fête," said the young Count, laughing merrily.

"May you always be as happy as you have made us. But your parents, were they not alarmed?"

"No, indeed, it was with their permission I acted my part. Goodbye now, little Jeanne, and do not forget Jean Noël," he added, as they ran off after their parents, leaving Jeanne not knowing whether to feel glad or sorry to find that her Jean Noël was a real live person.

"Just fancy, Pierre, the little Count himself! To eat our poor food and sleep on the hard bed!" exclaimed Madame Briguez in amazement.

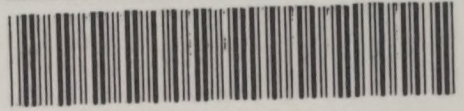
"It was the best we had, wife, and he knew that, and took it as it was offered, bless his good heart! He will be a great man some day," answered Pierre, admiringly. "And to sing as he did!"

"But, mère," said Jeanne, hesitating, "then it was not an angel after all?"

"I believe the child is quite disappointed!" said her mother, astonished. "My little one, it was the good God put the kind thoughts in his heart, and sent him to us, just the same as if he was an angel come down straight from Heaven."

The End.

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